# Indonesia short on oxygen, seeks help as virus cases soar

July 10 2021, by Niniek Karmini



People wait for their turn to refill their oxygen tanks at a recharging station in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. Just two months ago, Indonesia was coming to a gasping India's aid with thousands tanks of oxygen. Now, the Southeast Asia country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

Just two months ago, Indonesia was coming to a gasping India's aid with thousands of tanks of oxygen.

Today, the Southeast Asia country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China.

A shipment of more than 1,000 oxygen cylinders, concentrators, ventilators and other health devices arrived from Singapore on Friday, followed by another 1,000 ventilators from Australia, said Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, the government minister in charge of Indonesia's pandemic response.

Beside those donations, Indonesia plans to buy 36,000 tons of oxygen and 10,000 concentrators—devices that generate oxygen—from neighboring Singapore, Pandjaitan said.

He said he is in touch with China and other potential oxygen sources. The U.S. and the United Arab Emirates also have offered help.

"We recognize the difficult situation Indonesia currently finds itself in with a surge of COVID cases," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. In addition to sending vaccines, the U.S. is working to increase assistance for Indonesia's broader COVID-19 response efforts, she said, without elaborating.

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Overall, Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous country, has reported more than 2.4 million infections and 64,631 fatalities from COVID-19. Those figures are widely believed to be a vast undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures. Indonesia reported the highest toll of 1,040 deaths on Wednesday and nearly 39,000 confirmed cases on Thursday and Friday.

Hospitals are swamped, with growing numbers of the ill dying in isolation at home or while waiting to receive emergency care.

On Java, Indonesia's most populous island, hospitals began setting up makeshift intensive care units in mid-June. Many patients are waiting for days to be admitted. Oxygen tanks were rolled out onto sidewalks for those lucky enough to get them, while others have been told they have to find their own.

Emergency rooms at a public hospital in Bandung city closed earlier this week after running out of oxygen amid panic buying fueled by soaring infections in the West Java provincial capital, said Yaya Mulyana, the city's deputy mayor.

A man leaves with his full oxygen canister as others wait to refill their tanks at a recharging station in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. Just two months ago, Indonesia was coming to a gasping India's aid with thousands tanks of oxygen. Now, the Southeast Asia country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

"Panicked people bought oxygen tanks even though they didn't need them yet," Mulyana said. "That has led to oxygen supplies running out."

At one hospital in Yogyakarta, in central Java, 63 COVID-19 patients died in one day—33 of them during an outage of its central liquid oxygen supply, though the hospital had switched to using oxygen cylinders, spokesman Banu Hermawan said.

Indonesia donated 3,400 oxygen cylinders and concentrators to India when a brutal outbreak ravaged the country. As its own cases surged, Jakarta then canceled a plan to send another 2,000 oxygen concentrators to India in late June.

The daily need for oxygen has reached 1,928 tons a day. The country's total available production capacity is 2,262 tons a day, according to government data.

"I asked for 100% of oxygen go to medical purposes first, meaning that all industrial allocations must be transferred to medical," said Pandjaitan, the government minister. "We are racing against time, we have to work fast."

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In this photo released by Indonesian Armed Forces, a military personnel uses a forklift to unload relief goods from a Singaporean Air Force cargo plane at Halim Perdanakusuma Airbase in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. The world's fourth most populous country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: Indonesian Armed Forces via AP

A woman carries her oxygen tank after having it refilled at a recharging station in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. The world's fourth most populous country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

A paramedic pushes an oxygen tank at the emergency ward of an overcrowded hospital amid COVID-19 cases, in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. The world's fourth most populous country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: AP Photo/Trisnadi

Oxygen tanks are prepared for patients in the hallway of an overcrowded hospital amid a surge of COVID-19 cases, in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. The world's fourth most populous country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: AP Photo/Trisnadi

In this photo released by Indonesian Armed Forces, a military personnel stand guard near oxygen canisters and other relief goods unloaded from a Singaporean Air Force cargo plane at Halim Perdanakusuma Airbase in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, July 9, 2021. The world's fourth most populous country is running out of oxygen as it endures a devastating wave of coronavirus cases and the government is seeking emergency supplies from other countries, including Singapore and China. Credit: Indonesian Armed Forces via AP

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Given the rapid spread of the highly infectious delta variant, he warned that Indonesia could face a worst-case scenario with 50,000 cases a day. The next two weeks will be critical, he said.

The Ministry of Industry responded by issuing a decree that all oxygen supplies be sent to hospitals overflowing with coronavirus patients, and

asked industry players to cooperate.

Oxygen is used in making many products, including textiles, plastics and vehicles. Oil refiners, chemical manufacturers and steel makers also use it. But industry leaders have fallen in line in supporting government efforts to maximize supplies for hospitals.

The government has redirected oxygen supplies from industrial plants in Morowali in Central Sulawesi, Balikpapan on Borneo island, and Belawan and Batam on Sumatra islands, Pandjaitan said. Smaller oxygen industries have also been directed to produce pharmaceutical oxygen.